

PROUST SAID THAT

Issue No. 5

June 1996



In This Issue: Holiday Madness, The Café Lifestyle, The 1995 Proust Wake, Paris, Our Lady of the Typists, Proust Sightings, Chocolate Madeleines and much more

Café 220

Letters.... and Email



I have two overpowering urges (you will understand this): one, to let you know my response to your PST on the web, and two, to remain anonymous vis a vis your website. Rather not be quoted, doncha know.

So here goes with number one:

1. I began reading Proust five years ago with an oath to let nothing, nothing come in the way. I often think back on this as an ironic turning point. No sooner did I get midway in *Budding Grove* than I started psychoanalysis, quit my job, started my own business and, well, that was the end of it. Proust went one way and life another. Spotting your page, on gnn's Web Review brought all that back.

2. I am now writing web pages and thinking constantly about how short the attention span has become. (See point 1). I feel that I cannot assume a reader will stay tuned for more than 2 sentences in a row. (Forget fancy punctuation like : or ; as well.) In all my time roaming the WWW I almost NEVER settle down and read a full page or take more than one or two glances at other pages on the site. Your site was a first for me. I sat quietly and read, chuckling and even went back and read some pages twice just for the fun of it. Which brings me a new & valuable insight....actually this is something my brother always said but I had to learn it myself: if this is the sort of thing you like, you'll like this. So thank you dear P and all your support group members. You will be getting a wad of bills from me in the mail soon.

Our Lady of the Typists

Just wanted to tell you that your name came up yesterday in exalted company. I was talking to the Chief of Reference at the Library of Congress and was asked for my favorite website. I named yours and described it and gave her the URL so she could see for herself.

Our Lady of the Typists

I have received an amazing amount of delightful mail from Our Lady. See page 9 for a most amusing exchange.

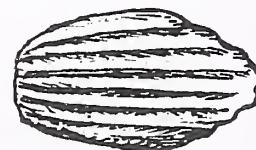
Please explain in tireless detail exploring every conceivable option how to obtain hardcopy of all *Proust Said That* extant and future. My *Proust Said*

Proust Said That is the unofficial organ of The Marcel Proust Support Group of San Francisco, which is about as unofficial as things get. We pay no dues, and most readers find us on the World Wide Web, at: <http://www.well.com/user/vision/proust/>

Consequently, neither the magazine nor the support group have bank accounts. If you wish to subscribe to the hard copy , please send CASH ONLY, \$4 for current issues, or \$5 for back issues, to P, P.O. Box 420436, San Francisco, CA 94142-0436. Orders from abroad must include an extra \$2 per issue for postage and handling. You can also send email to psegal@well.com

Endless gratitude for this issue's contents go to Dean Gustafson, who once again has created the beautiful cover art and sketches, to Lisa Archer and Peter Field for photographs, to Lance Alexander for the elegant items used for the wake, to Leslee Sumner and Chris Hughes for their articles, to Carol McCommon for all the things she sent from France (among them the photo of Aunt Leonie's kitchen), to Wes Christensen, for allowing us to reproduce his artwork, and Art Harris, in whose collection it resides, to Alice Waters and Bob Wendlinger for giving me their books, and to all of you who've sent letters, money, emails and Proust Sightings for enclosure, and everyone who's made me laugh.

Of course the gratitude department must include Jeffrey Gray and Cynsa Bonorris, for getting us on the Web and helping so much with the technological aspects of production, and to Lance, also, for his invaluable assistance... and Susan Radcliff, who does such a beautiful job printing the magazine itself.



That jones is hardly satisfied by the three semi-annual teasers available on the net. Give me more. Walt Love

I told Mr. Love that he could send me cash, \$5 for back issues, \$3 (now \$4) for the current one. A ten, a five and three ones, three fives and three ones, two fives and eight ones, one five and thirteen ones, or eighteen
(continued on page 26)

The Neurotic's Holiday Madness

It was a beautiful spring day, balmy and blooming. As I walked home from the daily errands, a small child appeared on the sidewalk in front of me. A toy in his hand wafted the surrounding air. He was singing: "Jingle bells, jingle bells..." A chill enveloped me.

I, for one, am very happy that the holidays are a dim memory and the next batch are still pleasantly distant, these times when we are obliged to participate in meaningless events, and we'd better enjoy them, too. Schedules are clogged with observatory functions, beginning with Thanksgiving, when we must eat turkey in company, coming to a crescendo with Christmas, when the parties begin during the first weeks of December, double-up by the weekend before, and ending with New Year's, which we must toast in company, or become objects of pity.

A variety of the champion neurotics among us bristle at such expectations. We might be deeply involved in a beloved project, or long for an unsociable evening in which to finish a great book. The demands of the moment are enough to dissolve whatever equilibrium we might have enjoyed. Even worse, had one's sense of well-being been dashed by unfestive sources—a loss, a relationship on the rocks, financial disaster—we need to appear cheery and social nonetheless, through events at which people seem especially happy while we are not.

Even if life is going well, with no loved one in mortal peril, no relationship just over or nearly so and a reasonable balance in the bank, a person with a huge sense of compassion is stabbed constantly in the holiday season. The sight of a homeless person minus turkey, unlikely to get presents, not drinking champagne because they are without friends and family evokes both sympathy and self-chastisement at not being grateful for the events that neurosis makes you resist. How can one be extravagant and merry with the knowledge that half the world lives in poverty, and an unpleasant proportion of it in loneliness?

The pleasure of holidays belongs mostly to children. Thanksgiving is a day off at school, a huge dinner;

Christmas means presents, a tree and a lot of sweets. Families with young children share their excitement, and have the delight of making it possible for them. The childless need to find other excuses.

The act of thanksgiving, I would think, is wasted when limited to a single day. Anyone lucky enough to have reasons for gratitude on the third Thursday in November should be feeling it daily: good morning, I'm alive, I can eat a huge dinner if I feel like it, I have great friends to spend time with, I can pay the bills! As for Christmas, if the Christ part holds no meaning for you, what is the point?

The holidays rob us of the pleasures of daily life that we love best. If they fall on weekdays, like Thanksgiving Thursdays, we are completely deprived of that beloved moment of the day, full of promise but usually just demands for money, the arrival of the mail. We can't

stop and see our favorite smiling faces at the corner café because it's closed; those of us who do not have the pleasure of getting a day off of work, we of the self-employed and entrepreneurial variety, can

expect no calls from potential investors, or clients offering that much-wanted paying work, and all the forward momentum of our endeavors is squelched for as many days as the holiday might demand. Forget the library, the daily trip to the splendid local market; the air is still on these holy days, the cities fail to hum.

Why is it that arguments with loved ones, and the demise of relationships, so often coincides with these theoretically happy days? Surely the expense, the demands, and the expectations of a special sense of well-being must play a part in this odd affair. Not everyone will have this experience, but many of us will: that fine individual we adore might turn into a raving monstrosity for the festivities. Is it because they, like us, are feeling the strain of maintaining a happy face for the holidays, and wish they needn't be obliged?

In an ongoing effort to limit the stresses of the holiday season, I suggested years ago to my family and friends that we stop giving Christmas presents. To my

*"...the holidays, those appalling absences..."
-Contre Sainte-Beuve*

surprise, almost everyone agreed readily. This might have been a blow to the national economy, but a wonderfully liberating sensation for us. We only got things for children, and had a much easier time.

I do not mean to suggest that I dislike celebrations, or the giving of presents; it's easy and delightful to find things for people you love, except around their birthdays or at Christmas. Celebrations bring you together with people you don't often get to see, and I truly enjoy some of the holidays that are festive by choice and not expectation, like Halloween. In San Francisco, the Halloween season lasts about a week, from the weekend before to the weekend after the actual date, and including the annual Day of the Dead celebration in the Mission. For nearly 2% of the year, you can wander the streets disguised as a Klingon or a Q-tip or your opposite gender, and the mail gets delivered every day except Sunday. The annual party here at Proust Headquarters is massive, and a minor social legend, drawing friends of friends of friends, friends of friends, and friends, as well as people who heard about it at another party, jamming all two floors of this formerly grand Edwardian.

We also celebrate another occasion here, the 12th day of Christmas on January 6, a day when merriment and festivity are virtually unknown in America. A day or so before the party, we scour the streets for the most perfect of the discarded Christmas trees, and bring home that one great thing of the season, the smell of pine, and decorate them with the strings of lights we have twinkling all year round. Each guest will bring a present, marked male, female or either, and have a piece of the 12th Night cake. The person to find a bean in his or her slice will decide who gets which presents.

Our personal holiday season overlaps that of the rest of the country. It begins with Halloween, with the Proust Wake about three weeks after and 12th Night at the end. After 12th Night we breathe a sigh of relief, and get on with being thankful for every day, until the Proust Wake, around the next November 18. The Wake is the signal that the conventional holiday season is upon us, time to exercise our neuroses until the new year begins.



Proust, Faulkner & Holbein

by Chris Hughes

The one thing everybody knows about *Remembrance of Things Past* is that it is absurdly long. To admit to reading Proust is to be pitied - 'how many pages?' - and secretly considered a little odd. Perhaps as a result of this I kept asking myself while reading it: why so long? Couldn't Proust have told the same story with a shorter novel? Seventeen pages to describe rolling over in bed (a statistic bound to impress your complete insanity onto your friends) is surely excessive? Some people, more used to 'doing' a novel in a week, find that after a fortnight with Proust no progress has been made, and give up in disgust - 'Where is this novel going?'. How is one to keep a new reader from being discouraged, especially one who points to shorter works, more obviously dense in meaning?

One such author whose work has always moved me greatly is William Faulkner. No stamina problems here - Faulkner novels tend to be short and easy to carry around in a shirt pocket. Arguably his greatest novel (and the only novel other than *RoTP* which I wanted to reread immediately) is *The Sound and The Fury*, his complex, tragic tale of the Compson family, set in Mississippi. There is quite a gulf between turn of the century Paris and the deep south of America, but more connects the two novels than is immediately apparent. *The Sound and The Fury* is divided into four parts, each narrated by a different person, but broadly describing the same events. The first part is told by a congenitally retarded man, with no conception of the passage of time. Stream of consciousness in the extreme, it is challenging reading. Events, described confusingly and full of apparent contradiction, tumble down the pages, one after the other, with no apparent connection between them. It leaves the reader bewildered. What is going on? Who are these people? In part two little more is uncovered. By part three things are beginning to fall into place. The wandering seeming nonsense of part one has told us more than we realised. In part four, all is revealed, everything comes into focus and the whole story makes sense, with an emotional impact which leaves the reader astonished. It really has to be read to be believed.

(Continued on page 24)

The Café Lifestyle

Throughout centuries of civilization, differing somewhat from culture to culture, one thing stands out as a well-beloved institution, and that is the café experience. The café, pub, coffee house, inn is the meeting-place for a community, a social interaction over the beverage of choice, a moment of relaxation for everyone except those behind the bar, a chance to greet known companions or meet intriguing newcomers. Some cafés, by the nature of their clientele, become famous as centers of the arts.

For a decade of my adult life, I lived in North Beach, that once-bohemian heart of San Francisco, immersed in the total café existence. The first hours of the day were spent in the Caffé Trieste, where my father had been a regular when it opened in the '50s, a piece of his old country where he could speak his language, discuss poetry and politics, and have a decent espresso. In the family tradition, I began the day there downing a few lattes, catching up on all the neighborhood gossip, chatting with friends, or, when left to my own devices, working on whatever writing I needed to complete. Late in the afternoon, or early evening, I walked up the street to the front patio of the Savoy Tivoli, where most evenings passed amicably with conversation, or the amusement of neighborhood slag-fests, and martinis, watching the parade of humanity on the street. The Savoy had a huge crowd of regulars who, like me, knew just about everybody on the terrace, sometimes all too well; any newcomer to our living room was met, purposefully, by someone among us, and discussed by all the hopeless wags. Other topics to get a lot of play: what we were writing, what other people were writing, what we were reading, and the characteristics and suitable fates of the cohabitators of this café planet. I never found this boring, and on the nights when I was forced to leave the neighborhood, I found myself wondering what I had missed at the Savoy. Fortunately I would hear multiple versions of what happened over the next day's wake-up latte, daily café *Rashomon*.



The Savoy Tivoli terrace by Kevin Evans

One never knew when there'd be a new entertainment on the street in front of the Savoy. One summer, a 20-piece French brass band would pull up their bus, bring out their instruments and play for us every few weeks, and we loved them. For years we had occasional performances by an amazing fellow, a son, one guessed, of some Caribbean plantation magnate. His immense white limo would pull up, he would leap from the back and to a crowd of mostly white people wearing black, this ebony prince in his immaculate white suit and white straw fedora would bellow arias from Italian opera. It was awful, but when he was gone, everybody was in a much better mood. Or perhaps, one of the grand beat poet survivors would show up and have a raging argument with someone else, a prime topic for weeks of discussion.

Every so often you'd leave your seat on the terrace, and go inside to the bar to talk to Franco, the bartender and Buddha of the Beach, perhaps sit down to have a round with that trustfund baby who burned out with the postwar

bohemian expatriots, and knew Durrell, His Lord and Lady Leslie, or my dear friend and primary cruising partner, O'Toole, who had come to Franco's presence. Or you might stroll out with a few friends to get dinner somewhere, or to go by a few other places, in search of a someone you might want to see, who'd be hiding in another café, working on his screenplay. You'd go by the Roma, saunter through to the back garden, and back out again, then up to the garden behind the original Old Spaghetti Factory, and see who was contributing to the night air beneath the fig and datura trees, peek into the Trieste. You'd walk into places, scan the clientele, and failing to find the person you sought, head back out to look in more unsociable spots. The truly retiring would be sequestered at a table upstairs at the Europa on Columbus, or upstairs at Vesuvio.

Once in a while you'd run into someone else along the way, stop and have a something, but eventually you'd

be back at the Savoy. And if you waited long enough on the terrace, the person you were looking for would at least saunter by. Sitting on the terrace, Jack Sarfatti would tell you about his newest theory, his personal war with a huge figure in New Age big business, or books, or you'd nod at the funny rants of Kim, whose first claim to fame was being the subject of an article in *Esquire*, about golden boys who have surprised everyone by not being famous yet. Stephen Schwartz would come in with plenty to say, about his current book or this week's attempted assassination of his character. My beloved pal Miss X taught me everything I know about neurosis.

Lin, Danise, Pamela and Miss X became sisters I never had. Dozens of others offered great company while you waited for a particular person to show up.

Writers often have some affinity to cafés. Their work precludes co-workers, being a solitary endeavor, but the loneliness is tempered by the presence of other bodies. The voices you choose to tune in tell you stories, give you plots, or give you, with observation, the details with which your characters are adorned, patterns of speech, expressions, garments, body language. I wrote a book in those naughty days called *Caffé Chiachiarino* (*Caffé Little Blabbermouth*) based entirely on stories people told me over drinks. I didn't do it well enough, but it sits there, in one of my filing cabinets, perhaps material for the days when I give up society and retire to a cork-lined room.

In retrospect, those years were like a minor golden era in the history of café life. A true golden era arose in Paris during the life of Proust, and perhaps partly because of him, as he was a café habitué, one of those people who, if you sat down beside him in a café, would say something witty; surely his appearances were discussed by others who saw him after he was gone. His friend Léon Daudet, in his book *Salons et journaux*, remembers the charm of café nights with



"The joy of those who made their way into the cafés was the greater... the client ordered a drink and the waiter hurried off to get it.. Then, while he waited for it to come, keeping his eyes glued to each fresh arrival, longing to start a conversation with him... while those present were drinking and playing and keeping up a continuous flow of gay talk... careless ease and a general sense of well-being .."

-Jean Santeuil

Proust, "...wrapped up in woolens like a Chinese knick-knack. He would ask for a grappa de raisin and a glass of water and declare that he just got up, that he had influenza, that he was going back to bed, that the noise was bothering him, glance around him anxiously, then mockingly, finally bursting out in a magical laughter and stay. Soon coming from his lips, hastily and tentatively offered, remarks of extraordinary originality and perceptions of diabolical subtlety..."

When Proust rose from bed in the late evening, without a particular social occasion to rouse him, he often went for a cruise of the cafés. Like most café afficianados, Proust had his favorites; he was most inclined to go to Larue's or the Café Weber, or to dine at the ultra-chic Ritz, all places of sumptuous quality where the well-to-do gathered to eat, drink and socialize. The Ritz became something of a second home, thanks, no doubt, to his habit of tipping extravagantly. Long after the Ritz had closed for the night, Proust could send one of his household to fetch him a beer there, as they'd been shown and permitted access to the supply in the wee hours.

In the book *Toulouse-Lautrec's Table*, yet another glorious work in the series that gave us *Dining With Proust*, and co-created by one of the Proust volume's collaborators, Jean-Bernard Naudin, we are told of the scene at the Café Weber. Regulars included Robert de

Montesquiou, that likely model for Charlus, and definite model for Whistler's portrait, Léon Daudet, Debussy, Colette's husband Willy, and certainly Lautrec himself. Proust frequently dined there, according to his biographers, but sometimes, in the time-honored tradition of cruising café society, "... the collar of his coat half turned-up, his pockets stuffed with magazines and books, ever looking for someone he never found, Marcel Proust would make his appearance... then

retrace his steps, push through the door, and vanish."

Certainly Proust must have made similar appearances at the Bar du Pont-Royale, next door to his publishers, Gallimard. This house, started by a partnership of three that included André Gide, had rejected him at first (as told in PST #4) but later had a change of heart, and all their editors and writers met there to do after-hours business or just drink. Considering Proust's nocturnal schedule, what better place for him to confer with his editors?

Is it possible that he never cruised the Flore, where Huysmans (the other writer who seemed to find inspiration from de Montesquiou) and the Surrealists hung out, Aux Deux Maggots, where Oscar Wilde drank twice each day, and the menu bears the motto "Rendez-vous de l'élite intellectuel" or the Brasserie Lipp, the other headquarters of Nouvelle Revue Française/Gallimard? Proust left such a mass of minutia about his life in his correspondence that we are inclined to think that we can account for every minute; in fact we can't, and I dare say that many of his unexplained moments out of the house were spent looking for the right company in Paris cafés.

Proust's café life was to outlive his terrestrial one. After his death, at the Café de l'Arrivée, Samuel Beckett went to avoid the company of other writers, and there wrote *Proust* in 1931.



All my adult life I have known that my true calling, the one way that I would make my fortune, so I might some day sit down at ease and simply write, would be to own the greatest café on earth, or the greatest cafés, as I plan to open them in all my favorite cities in the world. My café would be as much a salon as anything else, not filled with a decor chosen by some cutting edge designer, but filled with fine art, with books, great music, the thousands of extraordinary people I have met, the thousands I have yet to meet and, of course, the HQ of The Marcel Proust Support Group.

I have come very close many times in my life to getting what I want. Through each near-miss, besides suffering a certain unavoidable disappointment, I have learned an amazing amount about the hard edges, pitfalls and disasters of business. Savvy now, after eleven years in my own catering business and the knocks sustained in my effort to escape this dreadful career, which frequently demands stretches of 18-hour days on one's feet, I continue to insist on the hard way out: my café will be the creation of my life, it will be me, and so

I must own most of the shares in it, and I continue to search for solely financial investors.

The beloved Dean Gustafson, who knows me very well, and keeps a close eye on my business prospects, came up with an idea the other night as we looked over the sketches of Paris for this issue. "Thousands of people read *Proust Said That*," he said, "the kind of people who are drawn to you, your values, and what you have to say... So you should write an article about cafés, and tell them what you are looking for, and maybe the right investors will show up."

There was something about this idea that was so delightful; my efforts to reach investors have been, so far, through all the usual channels, addressing persons of business who have a keen eye for the bottom line on their p and l's, but no obsession to create, and profit by, the Aux Deux Maggots of the century. They might see the value of a chain that features the souvenirs of pop music, but few of these people understand, because they probably don't read themselves, the utter beauty of books, or the attraction that such a place would have for a population starved for a literary milieu.

Dozens of potential investors have surfaced over the last few years. "We're VERY interested," they tell me, "Let's have lunch." Or my young friend, the venture capital broker, will turn up a prospect who, for nearly a year, will propose investing a fifth of the needed capital, demanding this or that expansion of a detail of the estimated costs, and holding me at bay while his accountants ponder the prospects. When I decided

that one such person was a wash-out, he came back with the offer of the total investment, dangling the Big Carrot while his accountants spent another long stretch of months convincing him he was crazy, or perhaps he was just enjoying the power of making me crazy. In theory there are half a dozen people out there who have the all the needed money and are willing to invest it; I have yet to see a single dime.

Recently I have considered the ways in which other cultures deal with the investment situation. In San Francisco's Chinese and Korean communities, I hear, groups of people will contribute small sums to the big picture, and open a business even though no one has more than a few thousand dollars. "Hmmm," I say, "A hundred people with a few thousand dollars each would provide the funding for the cafe of my dreams, and I believe, of theirs, with half of their dollars stowed in the bank collecting interest, facilitating repayment."

Anyone who knows business realizes that opening without reserves in the bank is foolhardy; you must have resources to pay the bills until you have developed your clientele. Such a person wouldn't trust anyone who opened a business without back-up funds in the budget, plans of an amateur. So I look for twice what I really need, but those of you who've read this publication, who have a growing conception of the size and richness of my life, will know that my biggest asset upon opening is that the clientele is there, waiting for the place to go.

Among you there are people who are blessed, if not by work you love, but with decent rewards for your labor that are taxed heavily, people looking for investments to stave off the IRS from the wallet. There are people who have always thought that it might be wonderful to own a piece of a great place, at which there would always be a table for you, and perhaps, if your timing's right, the table in the kitchen. Surely there are among you many who would love to use your resources to create a great place to go, where you might meet some of the most interesting and arty folks in town. To all of you who might be in one or more of these categories, I offer this possibility, and a lifetime subscription to *Proust Said That*.

A stack of executive summaries waits in my office, and beyond them, the pile of blah-blah business plans; perhaps you might like one.



A Proust Sighting found in Eastern Europe by my wonderful friend Carrie Galbraith:

Give Marcel a madeleine to
calm him down,' says Madame Proust
and her son
writes books in the mirror, reversed,
you will read them facing the past,
you advance backwards
until you fit the mirror, turn around
and see yourself
considerably aged and the one that you see
cannot suffer, the image follows you closely but
suffering is a ditch beyond which
this mirror's life unfolds,
from now on you have a paper past,
a madeleine that moulds suddenly
in an expectation, whose end Marcel
continues to pull, 'rap his knuckles,'
'he's dipping the madeleine in ink,'
Madame Proust says, and her son
writes this very poem in the mirror
and while you're reading it
you're inevitably aged:
the marquise went out at five o'clock.

-Ion Morar

The Marquise went out at five o'clock
(Romanian)



At Last... An On-line Proust List

After months of waiting for the person to come along who would like to administer a Proust mailing list, our dear Miss Cynsa is willing to start it herself. If you'd like to participate, please send mail to:

Cynsa@well.com

Our Lady of the Typists...

One of the great pleasures of putting *PST* out on the Web has been the great correspondences it brings me. I have never met the charming gentleman from Germany who writes me on behalf of The German Proust Society, nor have I met Miss Leslee from New York, who has contributed a piece to this issue, or Our Lady of the Typists, whose first two emails appear in our letters column. I don't know their faces yet, but I have learned enough about them to know that these people are friends.

Late one night I answered a message from Our Lady, telling her that our last issue had gone up on the Net at midnight. My friends who were there to make it happen proposed that we toast the event. When I searched the kitchen for a suitable beverage of toast, all I could find was a bottle of aquavit in the freezer, left over from Dean Gustafson's last birthday party. In my message to Our Lady, I mentioned that we had pulled out the aquavit for the occasion. She wrote me this letter in response:

Funny you should mention aquavit! We have a thing for aquavit here:

During the last bout of Olympics (I lose track) the

ONLY story on tv about the event that interested me was Charles Kuralt's colorful account of the history of aquavit. He told how it was made from caraway seeds (people will make alcohol out of anything!) and how it had to be carried in a ship twice(!) across the equator and how every bottle has a map of the path of the ship and the points at which the equator was crossed.

I HAD to have some! So I searched, in a desultory way, for a few years. I only go in a liquor store once or twice a year. Finally I found it.

Well it sucks.

SO—cause we have to unload this gigantic bottle purchased in my poetic enthusiasm—we started taking the bottle with us whenever we were invited anywhere. Always I do a dramatic exposition of the story, making people peer at the map on the back of the label. I get them all excited and then they can't wait for a LARGE shot. (They never ask for seconds). It's tough cause you can't make the same group of people drink it TWICE...so always we are on the look-out for aquavit virgins.

My husband 's and my secret fantasy is that one dark and stormy night a car will break down in our



neighborhood and they will come to us for aid. They will be Norwegian. We will offer Aquavit. They will be astounded! And our secret fear is that, ten years from now when we have managed to empty the bottle, the same car will break down and we will NOT be able to offer Aquavit.

So—you can see that your mention touched a nerve (nay, an obsession).

The moral of the story: NEVER watch sports on tv. No telling how it will change your life.

What's the story behind your bottle?

So I told her this story. Every year, for the last four years, we have celebrated Dean Gustafson's birthday at Proust HQ. Five years ago, at a Cacophony Meeting at the Edinburgh Castle; I told him about the aquavit parties we had lived through in Los Angeles during my college years, and how much fun they were, and so in honor of this extraordinary Swede, I proposed an aquavit party for his birthday.

We gathered 20 of our much-loved mutual friends in the redwood drawing room of my house, and I set out long dining tables with a place for each guest. Down the middle of the table, garlands of herbs and red and yellow cherry tomatoes surrounded the classic aquavit munchies: flatbread, herring, roasted potatoes, lefse (potato tortillas), cheeses and meats, cucumber salad. The guests brought the bottles, except for one that I froze in a cylinder of flower-filled ice. When everyone had arrived, the drinking began in the fine Scandinavian tradition.

A shot was poured for each guest. A first toast was offered, every guest looked into the eye of every other while a piece of flatbread was chewed to absorb the upcoming shot. Everyone said "Skol!", tinked glasses and downed it, then quickly covered the taste with a bite of herring. We resumed the convivial chatting, then, about half an hour later, a second shot was poured, toasted, skolled, covered up with herring and the effect became known. Everyone was in a suddenly



fabulous mood. By the third shot we all understood how Scandinavians get through those dark winters. By the fifth everyone was hugging and kissing, and by the seventh or eighth, several hours later, we ran out, and everyone got horizontal somewhere in the crumbling mansion for a sleep-over, and there wasn't a hang-over in the house when we rose at noon.

The next year everyone was anxious to repeat that memorable night of fun. It had been a bad year for a lot of us, financially, romantically, legally, or fraught with major problems of the family sort. Everyone brought aquavit this time, and plenty of beer and wine to enhance the effect. We gathered once again around the long tables and downed that first shot with great hopes, and got to the second one about 15 minutes later. Feeling a little better, we went on to repeat the magical ritual quite often, quite quickly, with a little vino rosso poured between anxious toasts. Within a few hours two of the guests were sword-fighting on the roof and everyone was queasy. The bathroom closest to the scene became a vomitorium, and Dean disappeared quietly into the night, being too polite to throw up in someone else's house. His roommate stayed behind, however, unable to get off the floor of my roommate Kevin's room, and threw up repeatedly on the carpet for about 12 hours. The carpet was taken out that afternoon. We had all learned the lessons of aquavit: it doesn't mix with wine, and must be consumed very slowly.

The third year we had an ice-cream social instead, but last year we regained our nerve and tried it again. Everyone drank with complete reserve. Several people refused to touch the stuff ever again, others got reasonably tipsy. No one threw up, or brought swords to the roof. Our Lady read my story and sent back this message:

I think this story casts yet another light on the Proustian revels (late 20th century style).

It would certainly convince any doubters that you are not a bunch of languishing effetes (I never met an effete myself).

What say you put it in the next Proust Said That? The hook being, how do you celebrate celebrating Proust on the world wide web... We could see aquavit sales skyrocket (or at least increase slightly my chances of getting anyone to have a drink from said doomed—and as you point out—twinned aquavit bottle).

Fortunately the pharaohs were mummified in aquavit (or is it aquavelva) so there is no chance of it "going bad."

I am laughing hard at the thought of it "going bad."



Aquavit, I must say, begins bad, requiring two food substances to make it palatable. In spite of this, we may have set some sort of minor trend, as it becomes harder and harder to find it in the local liquor stores, and when found, it is twice as expensive as it was 4 years ago. We at Proust HQ, however, are glad to have proven that we are not languishing effetes, and can leave the left-overs in the freezer, waiting for a Scandinavian's vehicle to break down in a storm at our door.



"...he came to regret every every pleasure that he tasted in her company, every new caress of which he had been so imprudent as to point out to her the delights, every fresh charm that he found in her, for he knew that, a moment later, they would go to enrich the collection of instruments in his secret torture chamber."

-Swann's Way

From *The New Yorker*, November 20, 1995

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Memorable Music

MARCEL PROUST loved music. He consorted with musicians, he had a romance with the Venezuelan composer Reynaldo Hahn, and he littered "À la Recherche du Temps Perdu" with musical references. One of the novel's characters is the unhappy composer Vinteuil, whose violin sonata contains a "little phrase" that jogs people's memories and acts as a central motif. Though there's reason to believe that Proust had a specific piece of music in mind, his allusions are teasingly inconclusive. Several real-life sonatas have been suggested as the model for Vinteuil's, including ones by César Franck and Guillaume Lekeu. But the consensus is that Proust's inspiration was the First Violin Sonata of Gabriel Fauré, the prototype of the others; Fauré, as organist of the Madeleine (the church, not the pastry) and head of the Paris Conservatoire, was France's most august musical figure at the turn of the century.

On November 20, at the Walter Reade Theatre, Fauré's perfumed work, completed in 1876, will stand at the center of a program in which members of Da Camera of Houston will intersperse Proust-related music with readings from "À la Recherche" by the poet and translator Richard Howard. Curiously, the sonata will also resound at about the same time on the other side of Sixty-fifth Street, when it opens the second half of Itzhak Perlman's recital at Avery Fisher Hall. The Vinteuil sonata lingers on.

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—Angry Thoreauan



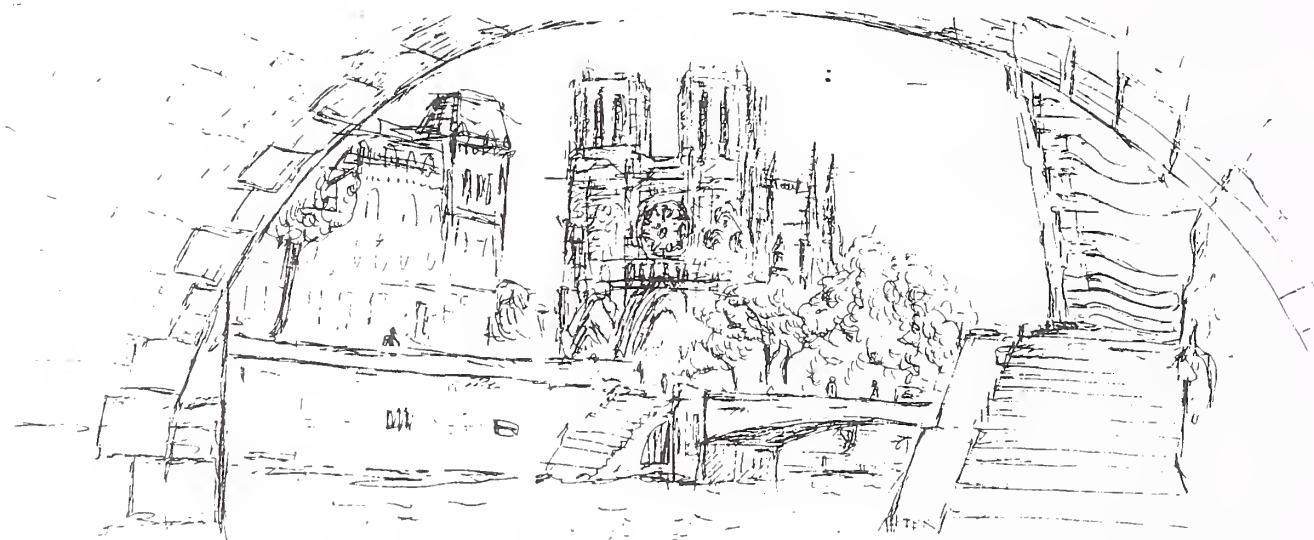
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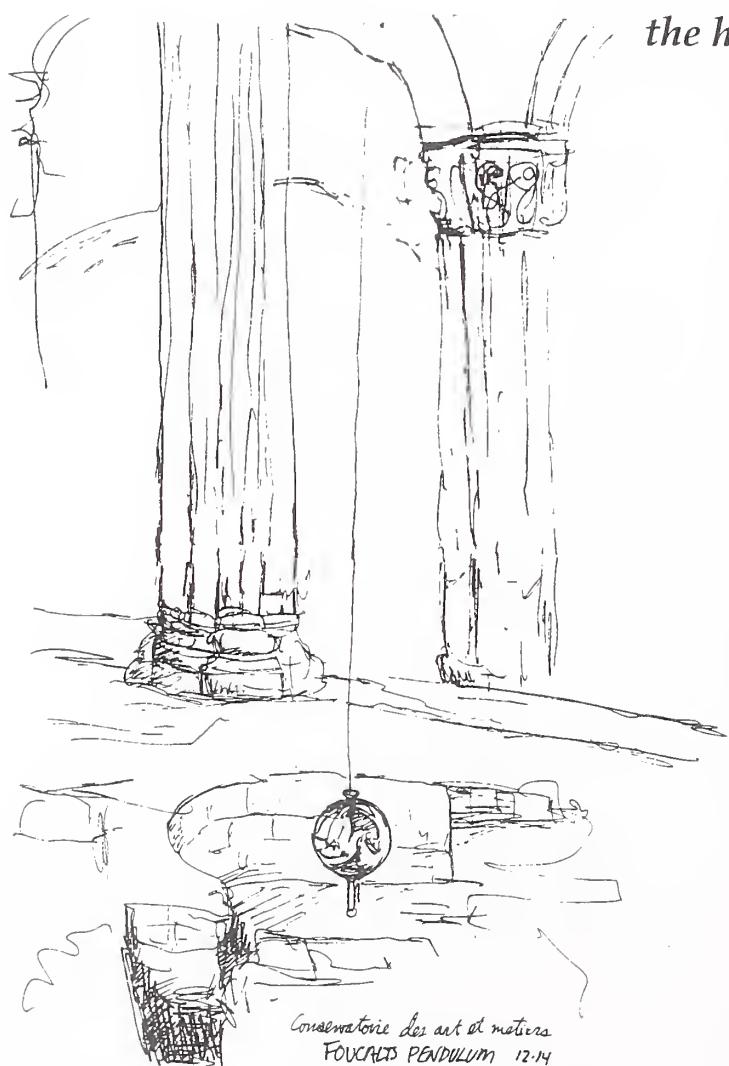
Proust's Paris

sketches by Dean Gustafson



*"It was almost another Paris in
the heart of Paris itself..."*

-The Guermantes Way

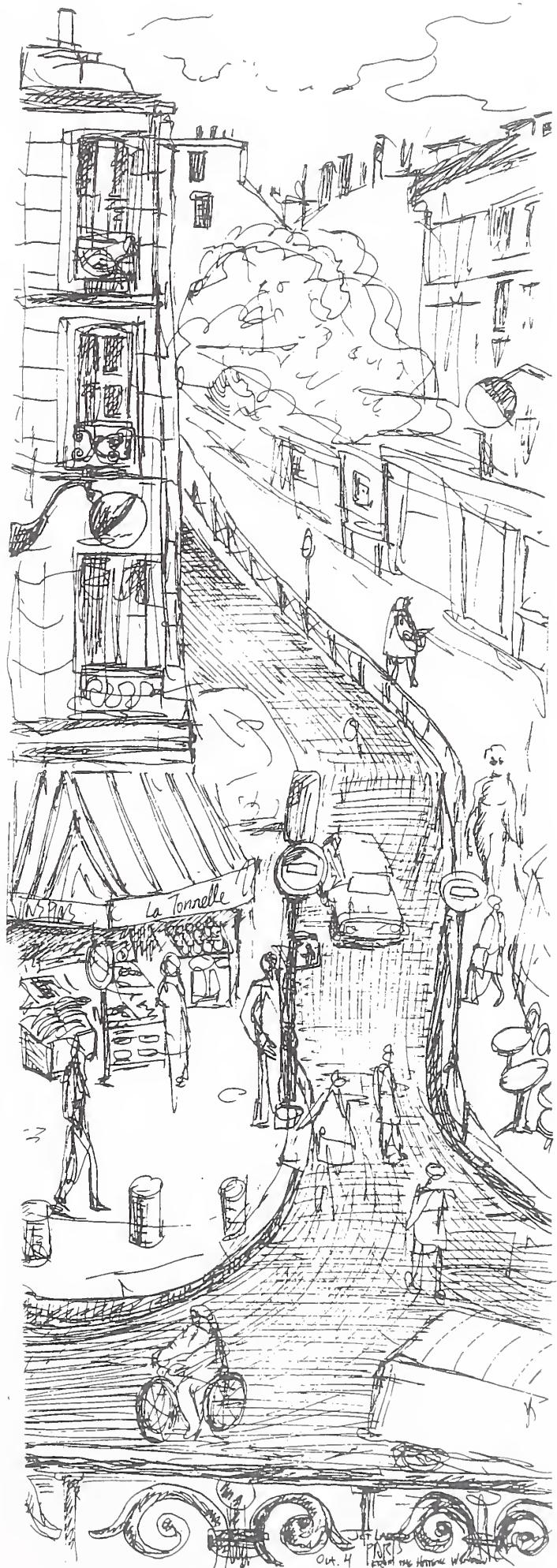


on Pont Neuf - Blvd. Haussmann



"... he had that detailed knowledge of
Paris only to be found in people who
seldom go there."

-*Cities of the Plain*



The Proust Wake of 1995

Mid-November of 1995, as the fourth issue of *Proust Said That* neared completion, plans for the 73rd anniversary Proust Wake did as well. The 18th, the day of Proust's death and my birthday, fell conveniently on a Saturday, and once again we would commemorate the day at John Wickett's amazing Museum of Exotica, one of the city's little known visual treasures.

Months beforehand, I began thinking about what to do at the 1995 wake. In 1994 we had stunned the guests with a cooked-up seance, as described in issue #2; Stuart Magrum, dressed and made up as the dead Proust (an admirable likeness) hid in one of the aeries of the museum with a single glass of wine, a long cardboard tube to speak through and a cranky old ridgeback for company until I could get the seance underway. On the main floor of the museum, I spent nearly two hours greeting the arrivals and getting the accomplices and innocents to join me at the seance table. Silence fell in the room, and the lights dimmed. I called several times for Proust to speak to us, and finally Stuart replied, script in hand. I asked questions about death that had been engineered to be perfectly answered by quotes from *Remembrance*, and Stuart read them with utter panache and a very believable accent. At the end of the questions, Stuart/Proust read that all this conversation was making him feel perfectly alive, and he descended the ladder into a mass of thundering applause.

Well, what could I do to top that? The seance was clearly a one-shot experience. Stuart emailed to say that he was willing to resume his Proustian disguise and lie in state for a while, since at least that way he could hear other conversations. He gave up on the whole thing when he heard there was no coffin to contain him, and declined to shave his goatee again just to lie on a table.

My real first choice for an alternate entertainment was chamber music. I begged John, my housemate who

cajoled me into starting the Proust Group, to bring some of his chamber music friends to play. He said he'd try.

The week before the wake, I called Bonny Doon Vineyard to say that my friend Nancy Denney -Phelps and I were on our way down to get a few cases of their Grenache, Clos de Gilroy, the official beverage of the Proust Support Group since it has Marcel's portrait on the label. But unlike last year, before the article in *Proust Said That* about this wine and the

Bonny Doon home page were read by thousands of people on the Internet, the vineyard was totally sold out. They gave us a list of every place in the city that carries it and wished us luck.

We went to the biggest place that might have it, and they were sold out. From their pay phone we called every other possible source, and found them all sold out. I was throwing a hissy-fit; how could I host a Proust wake without Proust wine? Nancy, clever and resourceful, has a genius for solutions; "I know," she said. "We have a bunch of labels we got at Bonny Doon the last time we were there. Why don't we buy something else, soak the labels off, and put the Proust labels on?"

We bought a few cases of a potable cabernet. It wasn't that lovely, fruity grenache, but we knew perfectly well that no one was going to protest a free glass of anything, and after a few, not notice any difference at all. I took the cases home and soaked them in a tub of warm water.



If I couldn't have a seance in which to charm my friends with the words of Proust, I thought about serving only foods that had been mentioned in *Remembrance*, and adorning the buffet with the quotes that mentioned each dish. Even though I've had a catering business for years, I was hard pressed to

create a menu that would work; in the end, I settled for madeleines, of course, the pink biscuits that were more expensive in Combray, the architectural chocolate cake served at Gilberte's teas, the ham that Francoise called "Nev' York", the caviar that the young narrator refused to eat, served with a lovely cream cheese fish and crackers, another cream cheese structure mixed, as the young narrator loved it, with strawberries, all the vegetables adored by Albertine, and sold by vendors in the street, and the remedial spice bread consumed in great quantities by Swann.

Several people did much to help me with this catering extravaganza: Miss Lisa Archer, one of my favorite conspirators in the art of parties, made one of the dishes, and our friend Monroe Pastermak, an excellent baker, came for an afternoon of making madeleines, bringing his own favorite recipe. The night of the event, Monroe surprised me with a huge batch of madeleines from an even better recipe, which you will find on page 25. My housemate Lance, who did the grand cover for our third issue, also surprised me with a beautiful collection of folding cards with the quotes about the dishes, topped by a cutout diamond emblem containing Proust's initial... and my name, P. On the afternoon of the event, others would come to help with the last of the preparation: Miss Lisa, the radiant Miss Harley, and the grand Shelley Johnson of Burt Children's Center, who had hired two strong young men for the wearisome hauling and clean-up. But for the most part, most of the days, and very long nights before the event found me in the kitchen, gearing up to serve more than a hundred guests.



Every few hours I went into the bathroom adjacent to the kitchen and chipped away at the labels on the soaking wine. It didn't take too long to realize that the labels on this fake vintage were made not of paper at all, but of plastic, and very strongly affixed. Plastic!

One evening Lance and I stood staring down at the problem bottles, and he told me that he's read in a book of homebrewing that ammonia helped in soaking off labels. I went to the corner store immediately and got some, and added it carefully to the water, taking extreme care not to get anywhere near the corks.

I was down to three days before the wake, and the labels were still not coming off. During those long waits in the kitchen between the filling and emptying of the oven, I'd grab a bottle and pick at a corner of the label. If I picked long enough, and lifted in the right direction, the entire thing would come off. After several hours of picking and pulling, I had removed them all, leaving a thick layer of glue on the bottles. The glue had affixed a label that was tall and thin, so there was no hope of using it to attach the Proust labels, which were short and wide.

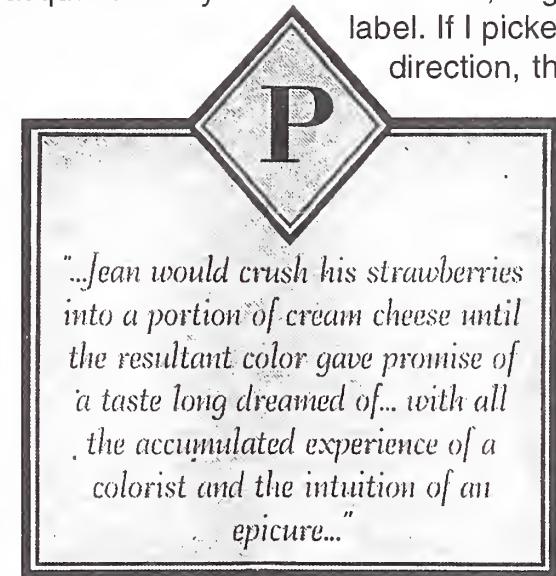


A few days before the wake, the last issue of *PST #4* was very nearly

done, and it seemed ridiculous not to have it ready for the occasion. The last article was finished, the photos scanned and placed in the waiting spots. Only a bit of embellishment and some proofreading remained to be done. I had read every word of it so many times that I was hopeless as a

proofreader; my eyes no longer saw the glaring errors, and I had already asked my cohorts for too many favors. About 24 hours before the event my friend Marilyn Wann, the charming publisher of *Fat!So?*, took me to her favorite copy shop to run off a few proof copies to put on the *PST* table at the wake. The gentleman who helped us at the counter asked if he could try on my lipstick.

After the wake, I had a chance to read through the one proof copy that had not disappeared, and found the ghastly errors. To this day I have no knowledge of who got them, and am still slightly embarrassed.





Any caterer can tell you that the 24 hours before a big and elaborate party are the busiest, when all the things that must be perfectly fresh are prepared. The night before the wake I spent 10 hours in the kitchen, and as I waited for things in the oven to be ready, I made exasperated and failed attempts to remove the glue from the wine bottles with nail polish remover, or by scraping with knives or other implements. Two of my delightful young friends, Mercedes and Jane, sat in the kitchen watching me. "Will we be as driven as you are," they asked, "When we're your age?" "No," I said, "I was born driven."

Mercedes tried to remove the glue with her odorless turpentine, to no avail. Jane tried some other noxious artist's material, but only succeeded in spreading the glue into wormlike blobs. I had to give up, and live with the fact that the glue would remain.



It was only a few hours before we'd have to leave for the site. The lovely dress I was borrowing from Dr. Edwina Pythagoras was delivered by Danger Ranger, who arrived in the costume of the day's earlier social event, the surprise birthday party for our friend Flash, known out at the Burning Man as the ever-welcoming "Papa Satan", proprietor of McSatan's Beefstro, where you could get a burger and a beer. Out there in the Black Rock Desert, described in the article about Burning Man in issue #4, there is literally nothing, other than what we bring; commercial enterprises are not encouraged, but of course, in the manner of most evolving human communities, they are springing up. Flash and I, friends of the project and fundraisers, were the only two highly visible proprietors: he ran the bar and grill, I the cafe. We had a friendly rivalry to see

which of our establishments would stay open latest, in the nocturnal fashion of Marcel P.. How curious that we should share this birthday.



A couple of hours before we would load up the vehicles with the catering for the wake, hopeless to find a last-minute solution to the glue on the unlabeled wine bottles, I snatched the rubber cement off the table where I'd been laying out *PST* and began to apply the Bonny Doon labels over as much of the glue as I could cover, while I waited for the last things in the oven and chopped the last crudité. I had done about four of them when it became clear that there was a problem: the rubber cement changed the color of the label to battleship gray. Fortunately my housemate Lance was passing through the kitchen just at the moment when I was gasping "Oh, no!" repeatedly. "Hold on, wait a minute," he said, and disappeared into his studio, returning with some obscure and highly professional substance. He applied it to one label, and attached it to the bottle perfectly. He did a few more, then disappeared quietly with the substance while I was preoccupied with the oven. It wasn't until we needed to begin loading the van that I realized that all the bottles hadn't been done, and sent the convincing Miss Harley to find Lance.

It was six o'clock. The strong young men who were coming to haul down the hundreds of pounds of food, wine, props, trays, linens, glasses, fish molds, tomb rubbings and portrait of Proust by Dean Gustafson, silverware, prep tools, and copies of *Proust Said That* were due to arrive. We nibbled on the pizza Harley got for us, our only hope or opportunity of dinner on a night of catering a nocturnal event, and waited. In the next half hour, Shelley tried to reach her hired hands, and



45 minutes after we began to wait, we couldn't wait any longer, and carried it all down the four flights ourselves.



Entering John Wickett's Museum of Exotica, even laden with huge and heavy boxes of catering gear, suffuses me with wonder. I always see something I've never seen before, and can't tell if it's because it's new, or because I have never spotted it among the other million objects last time I was there. John Wickett is always welcoming and full of tales, even when, like that night, he had a broken ankle and was a bit slower getting up and down the ladders.

We began to set up the bar and buffet table, with about 90 minutes before the guests would arrive. Seconds before the first ring at the door, Lisa caught photos of the nearly-finished table. Minutes later, the museum was full of wandering guests, the men mostly in tuxedos, the women in a lot of formal black. The lights were dim over the opened bottles of faux Clos de Gilroy, but the guests, looking at each other's finery and the splendiferous surroundings, wouldn't have noticed the glue on the bottles anyway.

Would there be chamber music? John still didn't know; it would depend on which of his friends showed up with their instruments. I saw two of his friends carrying them by mid-evening, but not enough for a quartet, and everyone was too busy socializing to play.



In theory, we were supposed to vacate the museum by midnight, but John Wickett finds my friends too interesting to send home. He himself climbed up a ladder into the secret entrance to his adjacent house and dressed for the occasion, and was deep in conversation at the theoretical closing time. Well after midnight the wine was pretty much gone, and the food supplies diminished, and this year, unfortunately, there was no absinthe for the late-night revellers. Guests were beginning to depart when my housemate John, and Nik Phelps of the fascinating Clubfoot Orchestra, sat down to play duets, reading music neither one had seen, ever or in years, at about the hour when the Poulet Quartet was summoned chez Proust to perform the work containing the little phrase.

Chamber music, so elegant and formal in a concert setting, takes on a delightful lightness of spirit when played among friends. Nik and John are both superb professional musicians, but free to express the moment as they pleased; John, momentarily lost in the sheet music, made us all laugh by saying "Where the fuck am I???", rolling his eyes wildly, but not missing a note. In a later piece, John and Nik exchanged glances, and Nik, during a quick lull in his part, said "are you sure you want to play THIS one?"

For the first time in days, I spent an hour seated, listening to the music. When the bravos and applause finally stopped, it was time to rise again, to break down and pack up the spoils of catering, and begin planning the Proust Wake for next year.



Late the following afternoon, John sailed through the kitchen on his way home from an afternoon of playing chamber music with some friends, and found me immobilized at the kitchen table. "Now I'm absolutely sure," he said, "where the little phrase comes from. We played it today, Saint-Saëns D-major sonata, number 3. It will be played next year at the wake... for sure." 



Proust Sightings!

One of those odd facts of life is that once you have become aware of something, the more frequently you find it in the world around you. Certainly, long before I became a Proust fanatic I would encounter references to Proust here and there, but now I find them with amazing frequency, or friends find them, sometimes in the most unexpected places, and pass them along. So I've decided to run a regular feature for each issue, and invite all of you to send your Proust sightings for inclusion.

I've had a stack piling up for many months, and it's been interesting to see where the references are coming from. *Vanity Fair*, as discussed in the last issue, has mentioned Proust every single month since July of 1993, in the context of their celebrity interviews based on the Proust Questionnaire; it no doubt holds the record for mentioning him more often than any of the major circulation publications, at least in the last few years. Running a close second, I believe, is *The New Yorker*, in which we've found the following references.

In the issue of October 2, 1995, in Gore Vidal's wonderful piece, "How I Survived the Fifties", he writes about an author who tried so hard to be included in the literary café society of New York. "...He had mistaken it," Vidal says, "for the great, largely invisible to outsiders, world that Proust had so obsessively retrieved from lost time."

The next month, in the November 27 issue, in "Cather and the Academy" by Joan Acocella, she writes "...like other marriages of realism and Symbolism in the early twentieth century (Proust's, for example) it worked beautifully."

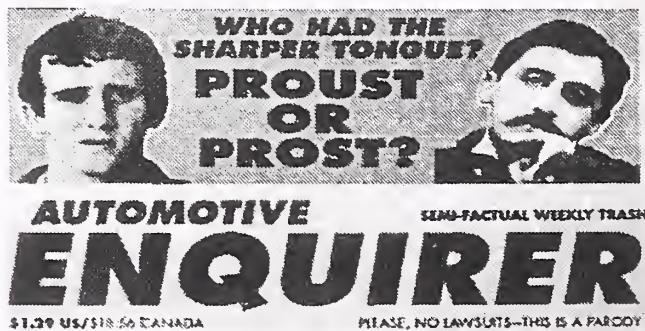
Only a week before the mention in the Cather article, a short piece appeared about two concerts to be given in New York on November 20 of Proust-related music. This article has been reprinted with courtesy of *The New Yorker* on page 11.

The venerable *Smithsonian*, in November of 1995, in the article "Time stands still in the harmonious world of Vermeer" by Helen Duder, printed this: "Among those who have celebrated *View of Delft* was, famously, Marcel Proust, who first encountered it in the Mauritshuis in 1902 and knew he 'had seen the most beautiful picture in the world.' He loved the painting and was transfixed by one small segment of it. On the right side of the scene, just to the left of a pair of towers, sunlight floods a fragment of a building: the 'little patch of yellow wall' known even to those Proust addicts who don't know the painting..."

This *View of Delft* came on a postcard from my *gentil* correspondent Alain Siboni, a Parisian who was just in Holland for the Vermeer exhibition:



My friend Rich di Giulio found Proust on television, in a rerun episode of *Northern Exposure*; the series about a small town in Alaska where the residents have nothing much to do except read, and are extremely literate. But he also found, while flipping pages in a dentist's office, the most unexpected reference in a mass-market magazine, this part of a faux *Enquirer* page in *Car and Driver*, August 1995:



Here in San Francisco, there is one writer known to literally everyone: the *Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen. Few of us here would readily admit to a taste for either gossip or nostalgia (except for old buildings, good manners, old hang-outs or the artistic merits of bygone decades) but we all consult Caen's daily dollops, to see if any of our friends are mentioned, and call each other up in excitement when they are. He is an excellent source of local poop, and one has really "arrived" when getting his attention. I knew Proust had arrived when this item surfaced on December 14, 1995: "Christopher Reed, the *London Guardian's* West Coast correspondent, led off his December 6 piece on the local 'peccadilloes' (his term) with 'The mayor's wife is denying a lifelong lesbian affair while her husband is trying to recover from being photographed naked in the shower with two disc jockeys he didn't know'... Reed ends his report with a definition: 'San Francisco, n.: Proust editing an issue of *Penthouse*.'"



A few months ago I was talking to my friends Joe Meulich and Jane Austin about catering their wedding; while we were discussing the merits of various menus, the conversation got onto literature. "Have you read Roald Dahl's *My Uncle Oswald*?" Jane asked. It was funny she asked, because a few days earlier, I had been wandering the aisles of a favorite bookstore, looking for something non-Proustian to read; I had picked up *My Uncle Oswald*, thinking that I had never read anything by Roald Dahl, giving the back cover a cursory glance, and putting it back on the shelf. Little did I suspect what Jane was to tell me: two chapters were devoted to the fictional seduction of Marcel Proust.

I returned at once to the bookstore to pick up the remaindered *My Uncle Oswald* I had considered. It was sold out, but the newer edition, twice as expensive, was there, and I began inhaling it en route home, and finished it soon thereafter. This is a very silly book, but charming because it combines lasciviousness and silliness in equal measures, not a bad recipe for an evening.

Also a few months ago, I saw my old friend Nancy

Frank, met in my college years in Los Angeles, who has for years mingled in all my own San Francisco social circles without our finding each other until recently. Every time we get together she brings presents; this time she said she was thinning out her library, and brought a City Lights book (so it had to be pretty good) she'd never gotten around to reading, *Entering Fire* by Rikki Ducornet. It came into my hands on one of those evenings when there was no unread book waiting at home, and so I started it that night. This tale is told by a father and son in more or less alternating chapters. The father, Lamprias de Bergerac, is an amateur botanist who roams the world in search of plants and collects exotic women; his son, Septimus, left at home with a horrid mother, becomes a Nazi. Speaking of a Party muckymuck, he says "... I saw that like the Jew Proust, the Maréchal liked to dunk his madeleines."

Alex Segal, whose wonderful portrait of Richter, and sightings in Richter liner notes appeared in the last issue, has been my main source for any information about classical music since my adolescence. As long as I've known him, he has not read a single book about any other topic, but he turned up three more Proust references in the last few months. In *The Art of the Piano*, by David Dubal, the author quotes the playwright Tina Howe's words about that extraordinary pianist, Glenn Gould: "He's a true ecstatic like Proust, Nijinsky, or Van Gogh." And in *Fanfare*, the magazine for serious music enthusiasts, November/December 1995, Peter J. Rabinowitz reviews "Evocation: Legendary Encores Played by Roland Pöntinen", in which the pianist has sought to create "an enchanting atmosphere from a bygone era. And whether or not he really achieves his Proustian goal..." And in the May/June 1995 *Fanfare*, in a review of the recordings of Magda Tagliaferro, "she... often talked of music and Proust to her great friend Reynaldo Hahn, who dedicated his piano concerto to her."

Recently I had a visit from an old friend of Alex's and mine from Los Angeles, Art Harris. I've known Art since my undergraduate days at UCLA, when Alex and I were majoring in advanced

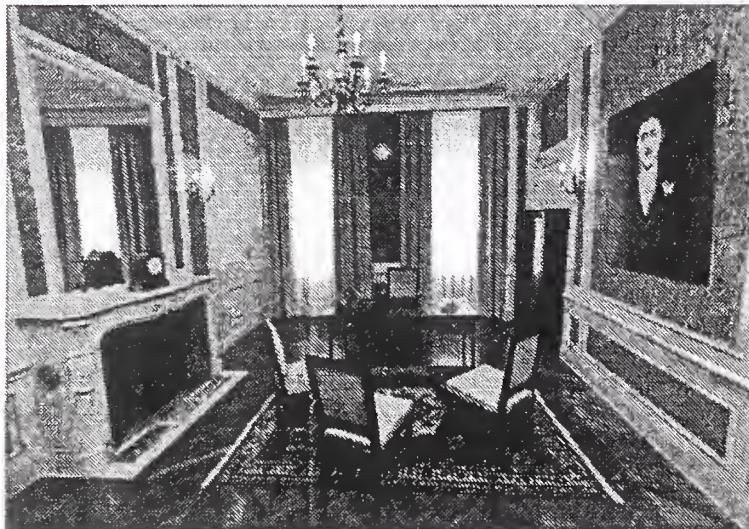
bohemia and Art was a grad student, hanging about a great deal in the ultra-social lounge area of the Graduate Research Library, where I worked my way through school. In spite of the fact that Art is definitely my most conservative friend, our friendship became cemented early on when I taught him how to leer. I went on to do my graduate work in underground socializing, and Art went into business, remaining a regular at my house nonetheless. As to the merits of our life paths, I can only say that he has managed to support numerous artists and craftspersons since then by commissioning or buying their work, and I have only fed them.

As our recent conversation wandered to the subject of *Proust Said That*, Art remembered to tell me about a small piece he'd bought recently by the Los Angeles painter Wes Christensen. Christensen, a Proust fanatic, had captured their mutual friend, LA writer Michael Laurence, at a garden table dipping madeleines into a cup of.... lime blossom tea? The piece was entitled "The Trigger."



Wes very graciously sent me a slide of the piece, and Art was happy to let me reproduce it. In his letter, Wes told me this: "The title, 'The Trigger', of course, is a reference to the famous madeleine-dunking episode... Michael and I shared an enthusiasm for this great work, a 'guilty pleasure' almost, since the mere mention of the name, Proust, conjures up in most people an immediate sneer, as they confuse the author's great subject, snobbism, with the writer instead. I tried to explain some of this to Art, but it is a lost cause to someone who has not experienced getting lost in the great *Roman Fleuve* himself."

John Berry, the gentleman who runs the international Sviatoslav Richter Society, sent me a clipping from The Times of London, February 15, 1996, about how the bank that bought 102 Boulevard Haussmann has recreated Proust's apartment, and made it open to the public. The bank has added a touch that wasn't there in Proust's time, the plaque commemorating his residence. This photograph captured the cork-lined dining room, where Proust did so much of his writing:



There were more sightings, but some of them so large that other articles must, entirely, be devoted to them. Some of these, to appear in *PST* #6, are the passion of Lucchino Visconti, and The Proust Group founded at Harvard in 1971. In the months between this issue's appearance and the next's completion, Proust will surface again and again; when he appears to you, please let me know.



Disappointment

by Leslee Sumner



One of the first things that endeared Proust to me was his remarkable candor. It first became apparent when after many months of studying playbills posted on the Morris column, and carrying on lengthy discussions with his classmates on the virtues of this or that actor, the young Marcel is finally allowed (against his parents' better judgement) to go and see the world-reknowned Berman in *Phédre*. Before the matinée, he works himself into a near frenzy by chanting words about Berma's beauty, "plastic nobility", "Jansenist pallor" which are replaced, when the anticipation reaches its climax, with a phrase from the playbill: "Ladies will not be admitted to the stalls in hats. The doors will be closed at two o'clock."

If someone had asked me to close *RoTP* at this point, and write an essay on how I imagined Proust would react to seeing Berma on stage, I would write that he would behave as 99.9% of humanity would. He would rave about the superiority of her acting-- anything else would invalidate his long-longed for theatergoing experience. Isn't that the way most of the world operates? The much-anticipated vacation has to be "sensational", the first kiss "extraordinary." Even the routine occurrence of weekends are almost always "great." But, Proust is able to transcend the temptation to dissimulate about his experiences, in fact, he habitually acknowledges his disappointments. At the end of *Phédre* he states:

"Nevertheless, when the curtain had fallen for the last time, I was disappointed that the pleasure for which I had so longed had not been greater."

Why, like Proust, do some of us suffer disappointment so keenly and so frequently? What sets us apart from those aforementioned children of pleasure who never experience less than the optimal vacations, or dry, tentative kisses? Are all of these people liars? Are we overly critical? The answer lies in the difference in our imaginations. the first group seemingly expends little, if any, psychic energy in imagining events beforehand.

They accept their acquaintances as they are rather than how they could imagine them to be. The second group, the chronically disappointed, maintains the rich tapestry of the mind-embroidering and embellishing events and persons prior to the experience or encounter. The problem with having a hyperactive imagination like Proust's is that its fruit is so much more beautiful than reality can ever be.

An illustration of the painful intersection of Proust's imagination with reality is when he finally sees the Persian style church at Balbec:

"...disappointed as I had always been by the actuality of places and people..."
-Time Regained

"But this sea, which for those reasons I had imagined as coming to expire at the foot of the window, was twelve miles away and more, at Balbec-Plage, and rising

beside its cupola, that steeple which, because I had read that it was itself a rugged Norman cliff round which the winds howled and the sea-birds wheeled, I had always pictured to myself as receiving at its base the last dying foam of the uplifted waves, stood on a square which was the junction of two tramway routes, opposite a café which bore in letters of gold, the legend 'Billiards' against a background of houses with the roofs of which no upstanding mast was blended... All that I have seen so far have been photographs of this church-- and of these famous apostles, this Virgin of the Porch, mere casts only. Now it is the church itself, the statue itself, they the only ones-- this is something far greater. It was also something less, perhaps."

Later in *The Fugitive* he summarizes the experience: "To be sure in that Balbec long desired, I had not found the Persian church of my dreams, nor the eternal mists." In his mind, Proust reorganized the landscape surrounding the church to create an architectural landmark on the sea untainted by the passage of time.

(Continued on page 27)

Book Reviews

Fanny at Chez Panisse by Alice Waters

Several months ago I had the pleasure of going to Chez Panisse with my friend Nancy Denney-Phelps to meet Alice Waters, the queen of California cuisine. Nancy, a board member at KALW, the PBS station owned by the San Francisco School Board, had hatched a brilliant idea for the station's daily reading of the school lunch menu, included by the necessity of relating the broadcasting program to the schools. She has solicited readings from a fascinating group of willing volunteers, from the lesser known local chefs to the stars like Alice Waters, and including unexpected participants like Father Guido Sarducci and Studs Terkel.

Nancy always schedules these recording sessions in the mornings, before I will rise from bed unless I must absolutely cater a lunch. A few days before she was going to Chez Panisse, she called to invite me to join her, prefacing the invitation with "I know you'll get up early for this..." and she was right.

We arrived at the restaurant at 10 a.m., and after a pleasant introduction, Nancy wisked the gracious Ms. Waters off to tape the reading. Still somewhat asleep, I spent a dreamy half-hour in the kitchen watching the staff prep for the day, talking with them as they sorted through the produce, picking out any not-beautiful bits, if they could find them. I had read that the staff at Chez Panisse is a group of friends, all engaged in their tasks with obsessive pleasure; it is no wonder that their food is so fine, and it was an honor to be around it, and quite fun, even if I was slightly in the way.

After their recording session, Alice Waters told us

that she was particularly interested in reading the KALW lunch menu because she is passionately involved in the way children eat. "Well," she said, "you are what you eat," and so she's become involved with improving the cuisine in our school system.

As we were leaving, Alice Waters gave each of us a copy of her new book, *Fanny at Chez Panisse*, and Nancy and I looked at each other, laughing, and whipped out our pens. Gracious to our good-bye, she signed them for us, and I was, by that time, ecstatic to have gotten out of bed. When I made it back into bed that night, I brought the book with me, and could not go to sleep, the early rising notwithstanding, until I had finished it.

"...a brill because the fish-woman had guaranteed its freshness, a turkey because she had seen a beauty in the market at Roussainville-le-Pin, cardoons with marrow because she had never done them for us in that way before, a roast leg of mutton because the fresh air made one hungry... spinach by way of a change, apricots because they were still hard to get, gooseberries because in a fortnight there would be none left, raspberries which M. Swann had brought specially, cherries, the first to come from from the cherry tree which had yielded none for the last two years, a cream cheese... an almond cake... a brioche because it was our turn to make them for the church."

- *Swann's Way*



Fanny at Chez Panisse is written from the point of view of Ms. Water's lucky little girl, Fanny, who has grown up from infancy in the world of her mother's world-famous restaurant. Fanny tells us what it's like to be part of that world, from the baby who hides in a stock pot playpen in the kitchen, to the bigger girl who will go in to help the dishwasher hand wash the dishes when the power is out and business goes on by candlelight, and who helps with the gathering of ingredients, including the covert picking of wild fennel and mustard in Berkeley lots. She tells us about special events, like the annual Bastille Day dinner, full of garlic, at which everyone is very French and kisses each

other. Of course she tells us about the foods she loves, and gives the recipes for them; each dish is easy enough for a child to prepare, and yet worthy of a sophisticated palate.

As I read through the book, I could not help but recall the narrator of *Remembrance* describing his childhood

days in his aunt's kitchen in Combray. He, like Fanny, grew up in an atmosphere in which the best of food was served, looked forward to, and eaten in convivial mutual enjoyment. And long before the food had reached the table, young Marcel, like Fanny, had hung around in the kitchen to watch the preparation, and was familiar with the source of each ingredient, and the reasons for that dish appearing on the day's menu.

The charm of *Fanny at Chez Panisse* has stayed with me, inevitably. I knew how much the other day when I found myself staring at the wall of breakfast cereal in the local market, trying to decide which one to bring home. Off to the side I saw these tiny boxes of expensive granola, labeled "Chez Fanny" and gravitated to them. Beneath the boxes, a staff person had affixed a hand-written sign: "Alice Waters makes this, so you know it's got to be good." I took it home, and it, like her restaurant, her books, and her warm personality, most certainly is.



Aunt Leonie's kitchen at Illiers-Combray, where young Marcel first learned about the art of food.

The Memory Triggering Book by Robert M. Wendlinger

While I was on the phone one day, a major preoccupation, my housemate John came in and threw the book review section of the Sunday paper on my desk, pointing forcefully to a review for this book, published, as I read, by Proust Press. The person at the other end of the line lost me for a minute as I read excitedly about this work, and my very next call was to the office of Proust Press.

Mr. Wendlinger very kindly sent me a copy of his book, and I went through it in the manner suggested, doing the exercises, drawing the maps, making the lists, at least for the first half of the book. A huge spate of the catering lifestyle made indulging in the hugeness of memory an impossible luxury, but I followed the evolution of the process in fits and starts, and found myself living once again in those early, fascinating, difficult years of youth.

I have been blessed all my life with a remarkable memory. When I was five years old, I was cast in a role for a local San Francisco television show, written, produced, directed and acted in, and sets designed by friends of my father's, and my father himself. The wonderful woman, Anna de Metrio, who spearheaded this project, was an old character actress from Los Angeles, who my father met when he worked as a foreign language dubber for MGM. Between the scenes when I would appear myself, I lingered close to the set and whispered forgotten lines to the panicking actors.

In my wild post-university days in Los Angeles, life and its characters had a most literary quality. Everyone said I should write a book about it, and perhaps some day I will. The memories of our lives together were considered my province; frequently friends would say to me "You'll remember this, won't you?"

As a writer who's kept journals from childhood (although mostly in the years when I was unhappy) and who has spent more than one period of my life discussing the details of the past on an analyst's couch, I found the exercises in *The Memory Triggering Book* remarkably easy. Every now and then I would be stumped by things that I was horrified not to have at easy reach in the memory banks: the position of certain things in the kitchen of one of our houses, or the name of my first heart-throb in college. Following the author's advice, however, I brought them back in short order, and felt relieved.

I must say that in my own life, I am inclined to give much more thought to the present and the future than I give to the past, those years when I suffered a great deal more over emotional traumas. My childhood, however, was a rich education, and I am glad to have it conveniently within reach. What has really slipped into oblivion is the list of professors I had in college, but they, for the most part, were simply unmemorable.

The Memory Triggering Book is a valuable resource for any writer who suffers from writers' block, or for any individual who has not spent years in the care of a therapist. The memories we hold within us are the stuff of which we are made, and by re-examining them, we give ourselves a better self-awareness, the prospect of a richer future.

Proust Press, 6239 College Avenue, #303, Oakland, CA 94618 Telephone: 510.845.5551 CompuServe: 7351,1702

"Then a recollection that had not come back to me for a long time--for it had remained dissolved in the fluid and invisible expanse of my memory--suddenly crystallised."

-The Fugitive



"It is my article!... What I am holding in my hand is not only my own thought, it is thousands of wakened attentions taking it in... I must be for a moment some one of the ten thousand readers whose curtains have just been drawn and on whose freshly awakened minds my thought is about to dawn..."

-Contre Sainte-Beuve

Proust and Falkner and Holbein

(continued from page 5)

I was surprised to experience a similar moment of wonder at the end of *RoTP*. The narrator is introduced to the granddaughter of Swann, and as each connection between them is described, each memory touched upon, (by now distilled to single words of the most profound meaning: Venice, Combray, Balbec, Saint-Loup, Albertine) every event, every smell, every character seemed as real to me as any memory of my own. Proust sows his seeds of memory and remembrance throughout the course of the novel, and they bear fruit at every stage, but only at the very end do we see a whole orchard, a silently growing garden, which has materialised around us, perhaps while we were looking only at one flower.

Although the journey is a beautiful one, full of insight, wit and profound wisdom, the cumulative effect of these experiences provides the novel with its emotional intensity, depth and richness. Over thousands of pages Proust layers memory on memory to provide a distillation of his, and every, life. Faulkner planted his memories by scrambling them, placing them in your mind surreptitiously, and just as you were most confused, secretly creating the whole emotional structure of the novel. Proust does it all in plain sight, and as he lays his foundations slowly, methodically, one brick at a time, you see only one brick, however attractive that brick may be. What a surprise when he pulls away the sheets and reveals a cathedral.

Both authors would no doubt have appreciated a painting by Holbein known as *The Ambassadors*. In a portrait of two wealthy looking men, the observer is surprised to see a dark oblong blob at their feet. Only when standing directly below it does one see the shapeless form foreshortened into a human skull. In what seems a conventional portrait, even amongst every symbol of vitality and power, the artist places a cryptic and mysterious reference to mortality. A transformation occurs, because the viewer is forced to look again at what he has seen, and more to the point, what he has missed. These touches of genius, so different, so divided by time and distance, so similar in spirit, are what makes them unique to everyone who experiences them, makes them real, alive and contemporary. And that is why I believe that ten pages removed from the longest novel I have ever read would ruin it.



The New, Improved and Chocolate Madeleine Recipe

By now I have tried many recipes for the madeleine, as it is the quintessential cookie for service at Proust Support Group functions. In spite of all the years I have spent supporting myself with my culinary abilities, I have found all these recipes, to one degreee or another, troublesome. They either take too much beating, or stick easily to the pans, or come out with crusty, slightly browned edges that chip in the transfer process from pan to rack to plate.

When Monroe Pastermack brought these lovely, perfect -looking and very delicious madeleines to the last Proust Wake, he shouted over the heads of the crowd that this recipe was really easy. Of course I had to try it myself.

Les Madeleines de Commercy

2 extra large eggs, beaten

2/3 cup sugar

1 cup all-purpose flour, dry measure, exactly

1 stick (4 oz) butter plus 1 1/2 Tbsp, for pans

pinch of salt

1/2 tsp vanilla extract

grated rind of 1/2 lemon

3 drops lemon juice (or 2 of lemon and 2 of

bergamot)

For buttering pans:

1 1/2 Tbsp. melted butter and 1 Tbsp. flour

2 Madeleine pans each with 12 depressions 3

inches long.

All ingredients must be tepid to prevent the melted butter from congealing in the batter before it has blended as it should.

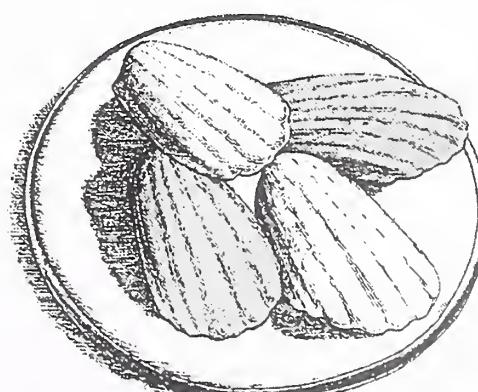
Measure 3/4 of the eggs into a mixing bowl with the sugar and the flour, and beat vigorously with a wooden spoon to blend into a heavy cream; if it's very stiff, beat in a droplet or so of the remaining egg. Set aside for 10 minutes. Meanwhile melt all of the butter in a saucepan, and let it boil until it begins to brown very lightly. Blend 1-1/2 Tbsp into the bowl with the Tbsp of flour, and reserve. Stir the rest of the browned butter over cold water until cool but still liquid. Finally, beat

the remaining bit of egg into the batter, and stir in the cool butter. Stir in the salt, vanilla, grated lemon rind, lemon juice and bergamot (if you have any). Cover the batter and set aside for 1 hour (or longer). Using a pastry brush, paint the Madeline cups with a light coating of the browned butter and flour mixture, wiping any pools that form in the bottom of the molds; set aside (refrigerate in warm weather).

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. After its hour-long rest, the batter will be fairly stiff. Using a spoon and a spatula, put a generous tablespoon of batter into each Madeleine cup; do not spread it out. Bake in the middle of a preheated oven for about 15 minutes. Batter will spread out to fill thecups, and will gradually swell up into a hump in the middle. They are done when lightly browned around the edges, and when they begin to shrink very slightly from the molds. Unmold onto a rack. When cool wrap airtight and freeze if they're not to be served immediately.

My first comment about this recipe, and any other madeleine recipe, is the importance of properly buttering the pans. Use a pliant brush, and take care not to miss a single cranny. Butter them as you would brush your teeth after a frightening visit to your dentist. And this butter-flour mixture should probably be used immediately; if left to sit for an hour it turns into concrete, and must be left over the heating oven to return to spreading consistency.

This recipe was, in fact, considerably easier, and I made it several times over a week to test the



(The chocolate secret is on page 27)

Letters

(continued from page 2)

ones. A few months later, he did subscribe, and sent this:

Today I have received the PST back issues. I will admit that I hesitated to subscribe. I asked myself, "How much more can I get in the hardcopy than I have already enjoyed onscreen? I mean, is this good value for my dough?"

But my higher self said, "Send the money for what you have already enjoyed, which will encourage more of the same." Then I surmised, "The production values of fave rave zines are so shoddy, I would probably have to hide them whenever we have company." But I recalled your comment that every bookstore to which you had shown the magazine had taken it, suggesting that its appearance needed no apology. So I gambled. And won. Text is augmented with additional graphics and all of it presented with a touch of class. And it's portable. How wonderful that I may now enjoy in bed what previously I could enjoy only when seated in front of a terminal.

Walt, a satisfied customer



I had planned to spend the evening being an unproductive goof and netsurfing, but I ended up finding your wonderful zine and can no longer consider the night to be the complete loss I had envisioned just a short thirty minutes ago. With the academy overrun by pedants, it is important that people still treat literature and art the way it should be treated—with a passionate engagement.

Keep up the good work!

Briggs Seekins



I have just read your wonderful text, and I am sure that the next time that I read my Proust, any page, I will smile with a glad feeling, knowing someone loves his work in a manner that would bring relief and tears to Proust and to all his readers.

Renato Alcides de Lima Prazeres
<alcidesr@unisys.com.br>

A passionate compliment for a passionate engagement!

Browsing through well.com I came across your page and enjoyed reading the combined bios of Proust &

You. One small caveat - you say that you attend "less and less parties" or was it social events? I suggest you replace "less" with "fewer". I was taught that the modifier "less" refers to amounts of a divisible item, eg: less mashed potatoes, less sleep. "Fewer" on the other hand, refers to numbers of discrete items, eg: fewer baked potatoes, fewer paychecks, fewer parties. Other than that, you seem like the next Proust to me!

Best wishes,

Meg



A flutter with the excitement of such praise, I sent my thanks to Meg. To them, though, I added my explanation of "less and less parties." My life is an ongoing social event, one party from which I take more and more breaks... Perhaps one day I'll take a Proustian decade's break and write a novel... She replied:

Sure you can print my letter, but now that you've explained the ongoing nature of your social life, maybe "less party" would be the wording of choice.

Good luck,

Meg

I love Richter, and I would love to have a print of the painting of Richter. Can you tell me the source? This zine is a jewel!

Gene Cunningham



The greatest book (in the greatest translation) ever written, Moncrieff's translation of Proust's monumental *Remembrance*, is itself a timeless work of art.... Random House published the complete work in a 2-volume set. Now it seems it is out of print. How sad! Random House is now publishing *Remembrance* in a new "translation" by Terrence Kilmartin. What he appears to have done is take Moncrieff's translation as his starting point, then re-wrote many of the passages because he thought Moncrieff's wording was not "accurate". In reality, what Kilmartin did was chop up and desecrate the greatest translation of the greatest book ever written. As Proust might say: "Oh horrible!"

"Does anyone really imagine that these motor-cars are as smart as the old carriage-and-pair?" (Moncrieff) or "How horrible! Can anyone find these motor-cars as elegant as the old carriage-and pair?" (Kilmartin) (From *Swann's Way*, *Place-Names: The Name*) As you can see from just this glimpse of the two translations

from this one sentence, there is absolutely NO JUSTIFICATION for what Kilmartin has done. Perhaps his work could serve as some scholastic study pointing out how Moncrieff was NOT QUITE accurate in some places, but also how Moncrieff actually added to the beauty of Proust's work. But to REPLACE Moncrieff with Kilmartin's cheapening of Moncrieff, on the bookshelves of the (English-speaking) world? — UNTHINKABLE. However, Random House has anointed Kilmartin as the font of wisdom as far as Proust is concerned (Oh, horrible!) The publisher has now ceased publication of the original Moncrieff, and only publishes Kilmartin's transection, er, translation. Moreover, and mosthorrible of all, Kilmartin & Random House have now changed the name of this greatest of all names from "Remembrance of Things Past" to "In Search of Time Lost". And while this carnage continues, no one seems to be doing anything to stop it!! By the way, I've heard that Moncrieff chose "Remembrance of Things Past" from Shakespeare's Sonnet #30, which begins "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought I summon up remembrance of things past" Kilmartin may next fix this one with "When to periods of meditation I call up a search for time lost." Maybe that would be more accurate. Maybe not. In either case, it would be a desecration and abomination.

Robert Homes

As a "Proustophile" whose friends have never read Proust, it's comforting to read *PST*.

I was especially happy to see your mention of his caffeine consumption. I'm a psychiatrist at UCSF who specializes in substance abuse so I've been intrigued by the dozens of drugs Proust consumed—his atropine asthma cigarettes, sedatives, barbiturates, opium, valerian, and more. No wonder he needed seventeen cups of coffee. What's so amazing is that instead of being a sloppy stuporous mess he was capable of writing a massive novel (and letters). When I'm feeling particularly whiney and tired, I think of M.P., for inspiration.

James Dotson

The Last Words on Madeleines...

process. On one try, I was able to create the chocolate variety, requested by Miss Leslee and suggested by Monroe. When measuring the flour, start filling the cup with two tablespoons of cocoa, then fill it with flour, leveling for exactitude.

Disappointment

continued from page 21

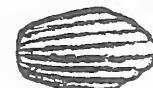
sea in a commercial setting.

How often have I done the same thing? I place such extraordinarily high expectations on a thing, situation or person that it becomes predestined to fail me. For example, a recent trip to see Vermeer with friends was visualized as a music-filled, warm, sharing road trip culminating at one of the great art shows of the century. How could the reality, which included dead batteries in the CD player, friends with food poisoning, and an overly crowded gallery filled with dilettantes pontificating on Vermeer's use of the camera obscura help but bring me to the edge of tears?

Is there any hope for those of us who are addicted to the world we create in our minds? Will we ever find happiness, or at the very least, will we ever thoroughly enjoy ourselves? The fact is, in spite of an overworked, overwrought mind doing everything within its power to anticipate, enhance, and ultimately destroy every experience-- it sometimes misses things. In these unguarded moments, we're taken by surprise and we... enjoy ourselves. Proust says:

"But in exchange for what our imagination leads us to expect and we give ourselves so much futile trouble trying to find, life gives us something which we were very far from imagining."

So, the Vermeer trip was a bust, but a couple of years ago I went to Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater and it was a transcendent experience. I had been preoccupied before the trip with other things; I hadn't given it much thought, or done any research on this architectural miracle. I can still remember the thrill that I received from the smell, the golden leaves of the woods surrounding it, and the unexpected beauty of the house itself. I enjoyed myself.



If you really want to make this process easy, break down and get those teflon-coated madeleine pans!



